



Deerfield Academy

College Advising Handbook

For the 2021-2022 School Year

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College Advising at Deerfield Academy

Our mission is to advise and support our students as they consider their futures beyond Deerfield. **In our student-centered process we urge students to be self-aware as they explore their full range of options.** We assist them in preparing authentic applications that highlight their academic accomplishments and talents. All of our work is guided by Deerfield’s core values—respect, honesty, and concern for others.

We encourage students to focus on finding the “right college match.” For our students that means identifying and applying to colleges and universities where they will be intellectually challenged and socially engaged; schools which will encourage and inspire them as learners, thinkers, and citizens.

Applying to college is a process of discovery, of pondering who you are and who you want to become, and of contemplating what role you want to play in the larger world. The college search is, in essence, an extended research project, which will require students to look within themselves for many of the answers. Students will learn to identify and assess themselves, to set priorities, and to make major decisions. How a student navigates through this process is just as important as where they end up. Along the way students will develop and hone their organization, communication, and research skills.

The Deerfield College Advising staff has an extensive breadth and depth and range of experience unmatched by many schools. We are here to guide and support you as you navigate the college admissions process. We believe that each student has their own unique journey through this process, so almost all of our work with students is individualized. Our commitment is to be responsive to both students and parents, as well as professional, realistic and well-informed.

Specific college advising staff responsibilities include:

- Developing a balanced list of prospective colleges based on a student’s performance and stated preferences
- Advocating for all Deerfield students in the college process
- Serving as a resource for parents and students throughout the process
- Estimating chances for admission based on student performance, knowledge of admission trends, past experience and Naviance data
- Writing an honest letter of recommendation for each student with an emphasis on strengths and growth
- Providing appropriate support to students as they write essays and prepare their applications
- Sending transcripts and recommendations to colleges in a timely fashion based on the list students provide in Naviance
- Maintaining strong, authentic relationships with college admissions officers

Email

A student’s Deerfield email address will be the main form of contact that we use throughout this process. We urge students to check it frequently and maintain its viability. Also, please contact us using our Deerfield email address to provide updates like your thinking about college, college visits, essay topics and/or drafts as you begin writing your essays.

College Advising Office & Staff

The College Advising Office is located on the second floor of the Boyden Library.

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The College Search Process

Ask Yourself...

The more self-aware students are in this process the more effective it will be. If students can be specific about what they want in a college, it is easier to help them identify colleges that fit their criteria. Of course, we understand that many students, especially at this early stage, don't yet have a clear understanding of what they are looking for, and we are here to help in this process of discovery. Many students need guidance as they begin to think about themselves as college candidates and try to establish criteria for schools they want to investigate. Here are a few questions parents and students might begin by considering. They are, obviously, directed to the student.

- What are your academic interests?
- What are your strengths as a student? In the classroom? Outside of the classroom?
- Have you worked to your potential?
- What activities do you enjoy the most?
- Do your activities show any pattern of commitment, competence, or contribution?
- What do you consider your greatest contribution to your community? (school or local)
- What are the characteristics that you feel are crucial for you in a college?
- Which interests do you plan to pursue?
- How do you want to grow and change?
- What particular facilities are important to you?
- How much of an academic challenge are you looking for?
- Is a particular location important to you? To your parents?
- Do you need academic structure?
- Does the composition of the student body matter to you? Describe.
- Will financial aid be a factor?

Where to Begin to Gather Information

We recommend the *Fiske Guide to Colleges*, which gives excellent thumbnail sketches of colleges, and the *Princeton Review's Best 385 Colleges*. The College Advising Office offers a collection of college resource materials. Of course, the Internet is brimming with information. A few sites we have found useful for students are collegeboard.org and unigo.com. Lastly, individual college websites provide students with the latest information about their campuses and their admission criteria.

RECOMMENDED COLLEGE GUIDEBOOKS

- *The College Handbook*, The College Board
- *The Fiske Guide to Colleges*, Edward B. Fiske
- *The Best 385 Colleges*, Princeton Review
- *Colleges that Change Lives*, Loren Pope
- *Looking Beyond the Ivy League*, Loren Pope

- *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, Barron's
- *Peterson's Guide to Four Year Colleges*, Peterson's Guides

Naviance

Deerfield subscribes to Naviance, an Internet database that we find to be helpful in the college search process. Deerfield juniors will be given a password/log-on to access the Deerfield Naviance data in the fall. Naviance helps students keep track of their prospective colleges and active applications and provides information about the likelihood of their admission to each college, based on the results of previous Deerfield students. Naviance can show students exactly where they fall on a graph of test scores (x axis) and GPA (y axis) of other DA students who applied in prior years to each college. It is important to note, however, when looking at these graphs that "hooked" students (recruited athletes, legacies, underrepresented minorities, first generation college students, and development cases) are not flagged as such and will skew the averages somewhat. The Naviance graphs show general trends and help students, advisors, and parents to develop a balanced list of "reach," "possible," and "more likely" schools. **Naviance is also used to keep track of students' college lists and is the mechanism through which we send the majority of school forms to colleges. Thus, it is imperative that you communicate with your college advisor to maintain and update your college list in Naviance throughout the process.**

Selectivity

There seems to be no end in sight to the ever-increasing number of applications to colleges, and with that comes the continuing fall of admit rates. The most recent admission cycles have seen more admit rates below 10% than ever before. Back in 1987, Harvard had the lowest admit rate that year at 16%; today, that is Berkeley and Colgate's admit rate. **However, it is important to realize that the number of applications a school receives, or how low their admit rate is, does not determine that school's quality nor its fit for each student.** Yet, so often in this process families buckle to the data and allow the ranking or admit rate to determine what schools are "suitable"—thereby neglecting the well-being of the student and the wholistic nature of finding a "best fit" college. The bottom line is that most of our students go on to independent colleges and universities that are "ranked" in the top 100. In fact, the biggest hurdle that many of them face may be their desire to apply to the same short list of colleges in which most of their classmates at Deerfield, and students at other New England boarding and day schools, are also interested. As such, it is imperative that students look beyond the familiar, standard list in order to consider the full range of colleges available to them.

Reputation

A word of caution—please make your own decisions regarding the relative merits of colleges based on current information. It is easy to be influenced by stereotypes and past reputations, but times change and so do institutions! Does this college have the program you are seeking? Is there a good match between your ability and the intellectual life of the college? Work to gather as much information as you can from *multiple* sources to get the truest sense of an institution. Remember that different colleges appeal to different individuals for a variety of reasons, and try to base your opinions on first-hand knowledge of a particular institution's unique characteristics coupled with a realistic understanding of the student's needs and talents. U.S. News & World Report and other similar ranking systems give only the most superficial glimpse of a college; they are certainly not ranking with your individual needs and talents in mind.

Independent Counselors

One of the many benefits of attending Deerfield Academy is the individual attention provided each student; this includes the college advising process. We understand that some families choose to work with independent, for-hire advisors, however, we assure you there is no need to do so. If you are considering hiring an outside agent, essay consultant, or application manager, please discuss this with your child's advisor. It is important we have a full understanding of the advice you receive from outside sources as we work to support you. Remember, your Deerfield advisor is the only one who can represent the student to colleges.

What Are Colleges Looking For?

When reviewing students' applications admissions committees consider several factors: academic program and grades, standardized test scores, extracurricular and community-based activities, recommendations, essays and, in some cases, interviews or demonstrated interest.

The Academic Program and Record

For the majority of our students, academic performance—the courses a student has taken and how well they have done in mastering their content—is central to his or her success as an applicant. While colleges like to see depth in every area of the curriculum, they understand that scheduling and extracurricular commitments do not always allow for this. Although each college has different guidelines on course selection in high school, the most selective colleges are typically looking for:

- 4 years of English
- 4 years of math (including calculus for students interested in Engineering or Business)
- 3-4 years of history/social science/philosophy & religion
- 3-4 years of lab science, including physics, chemistry, and biology
- 3-4 years of one foreign language
- and usually some study of visual or performing arts (1 year graded required by the University of California system)

In June after the junior year we will send a copy of the transcript(s) we have on file. While college admissions officers appreciate an improving record, performance all the way through high school will figure in their decisions. Many colleges ask students to indicate a possible major or to apply for specific programs. Obviously, an applicant's academic profile should match the program or major to which they apply. Students should consult with their college advisor in selecting senior year courses.

Standardized Test Scores

While an increasing number of schools have made standardized tests optional (and a few have even become “test blind”), for most colleges, having a strong SAT or ACT score can help you in the admissions process. Super-scoring (combining the highest scores from different test sittings) does happen at most institutions for the SAT, but less often for the ACT. Essentially, it is important to understand colleges' testing requirements, and it is recommended that students plan for and take standardized tests as part of their college application process. Check college websites to find up-to-date information on testing policies and median test score ranges for accepted students.

Extracurricular Activities

Because admissions officers are looking for students who will add to the community as well as to the classroom, how students spend their time outside the classroom matters. Special talents, such as musical or athletic skills, community leadership, work with publications, or dramatic or artistic abilities, are all still weighed in the decisions. We find that admission committees favor a student who demonstrates authentic passion and meaningful contributions. While many college freshmen are well-rounded, admissions offices are wary of the student who does things just to build a long list of extra-curriculars for college applications.

Arts Supplements/Music Auditions

You should begin to prepare your arts supplement/music audition piece over the summer before your senior year, whether you plan to submit a theater clip, a music clip, or slides of your artwork or photography. Art and music instructors at Deerfield are available to help students put together portfolios or audition tapes in the fall of their senior year. If you are applying to a music degree program, please know that an increasing number of music

schools are requiring prospective undergraduates to send a pre-screen audition (CD, DVD, web-based platform) before considering them for live auditions. Check carefully for due dates, which sometimes differ from application deadlines, and instructions about the desired/required format for your submission.

Recommendations

For most colleges, required recommendations will come from the college advisor and two teachers (of the student's choosing). We usually recommend that those teachers come from two different academic areas. During the spring term of the junior year, students and their college advisor will discuss who to select for their teacher recommendations. Overall, recommendations help the college get a deeper understanding of the applicant as a student.

Personal Statement/College Essays

Colleges almost always require (yes, some do not) applicants to submit an essay. The essay is an opportunity for the student to showcase themselves. Being authentic is critical. As UPenn says on their website: "We carefully read each essay you submit, as they can help us get to know you much better than your transcripts and test scores. While essays are a good indication of how well you write, they are also windows into how you think, what you value, and how you see the world. Your numbers tell us what kind of student you are. Your essays tell us what sort of person you are—and provide a glimpse into the intangibles you might bring to our community."

The 2021-2022 common application essay prompts (students choose one to answer and they are capped at 650 words) are:

- Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
- Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?
- Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?
- Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.
- Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?
- Share an essay on any topic of your choice. It can be one you've already written, one that responds to a different prompt, or one of your own design.

In addition to the common application essay, many colleges ask very specific supplemental essay questions—some are short answers and others can prompt additional 500-word essays. You can find schools' supplemental essay questions through the Common Application, as well as the schools' individual websites.

Legacy/Connections

The whole question of alumni legacies or influential friends is difficult to gauge, but our general recommendation to students is not to be too proud to take advantage of "connections." The alumni legacy does count for something; it may tip a candidate into the college when all else seems equal, but it also may only prompt an especially regretful letter of denial. Parents and students are cautioned, however, not to "manufacture connections," asking for letters of reference from individuals who do not know the candidate well. Many students who are admitted to college have no "connections," and using "connections" that one really doesn't have can be a

decidedly negative influence on the admission decision. We must also caution you not to rely too heavily on connections; they are obviously no substitute for a strong record and careful evaluation of the right match between student and college.

College Advising Timeline for Students

Ninth Grade

Ninth grade is more about acclimating to Deerfield and establishing a strong foundation for academic and extracurricular success than it is about applying to college. Our advice to students is to use this time wisely, and to make the most of the opportunities available here at Deerfield. Get involved in activities which interest you. Seek out courses that will appropriately stimulate and challenge you—course selection and how you perform in those courses is key to establishing a strong academic profile. Consequently, spend time speaking to your faculty advisor and your parents regarding what you plan on studying. Also, for potential Division I or II athletes, be sure to check with the college advising office if you have questions about NCAA compliance, particularly if you repeated a grade.

Overall, you don't need to think too much about the details of the college admission process. Instead work hard, get involved, discover your passions, and have some fun!

Tenth Grade

Tenth-grade students should begin to prepare themselves for the admissions process, not by selecting specific colleges to apply to, but by thorough self-exploration. At this early stage it is helpful to know what one's personal preferences are, as well as what the college search process ahead will look like. To this end, the college advisors will hold an introductory college session for tenth-graders in January or February after which they will be available for a few weeks for ad-hoc one-on-one counseling to answer any individual questions. During those meetings, tenth-graders can check in with a college advisor on items such as, course selection, review of NCAA compliance if they hope to be a recruited athlete, standardized testing, and summer programs. Tenth-graders are also welcome to attend the spring college fair. Although visits to colleges typically begin in earnest with spring break of one's junior year, some students and their parents may want to begin touring campuses in the summer between their tenth-grade and junior years to get a general feel for what colleges will be a "good fit" based on location, size, academic focus, and selectivity. A comprehensive list of colleges for a student will be created in the winter of their junior year.

Junior Year

We begin our work with juniors with our fall term college advising seminar, and then start individual meetings after seniors have submitted their early applications. Students will be assigned to specific college advisors in mid-November; assignments will be emailed and available on DAinfo. Each college advisor will work with a cross-section of the class.

FALL TERM COLLEGE ADVISING SEMINAR

This is a required seminar for juniors about gearing up for the college admissions/application process, and will meet in late September or early October. Juniors will be divided into small groups and are scheduled for the seminar during one of their free periods. The seminar will:

- Explore the various factors that can influence college choice, such as location, size, proximity to a city, relative degrees of competitiveness and selectivity, and the availability of special programs or facilities.
- Introduce students to Naviance and students will be given a password for this internet database.
- Touch on testing, interviews, recommendations, visiting schools, how admission officers make their decisions, and any other concerns that the students in each group may have.

In this seminar the college advisors will stress the tremendous variety of colleges and the fact that the search must be an individual one. By explaining the process in great detail during the junior year, we hope to make each student feel comfortable with this new responsibility and encourage rational, intelligent decisions during the senior year. We are starting this discussion early in the junior year so that the student has time to digest a significant amount of information and thoroughly complete a sensible exploration of colleges, a task that is very

often time-consuming. Begun now and pursued diligently, the process need not compromise a student's academic performance during the junior or senior year. It is imperative for students to attend the fall term seminar, for we plan to cover important material, after which each student will be required to complete an Information Form that will guide us in the college advising process.

INFORMATIONAL SESSION FOR PARENTS (MID-JANUARY)

Parents should look for an invitation to an informational session with college advisors in December. Sent along with that invitation is our parent questionnaire which is helpful as we get to know each child. We ask that the Parent Questionnaire be filled out by early February. After this informational session we will also send out Naviance sign-in information for parents who request it.

WINTER TERM AND SPRING TERM JUNIOR YEAR

After the seniors' early decision deadline, and after you have completed your Junior Questionnaire, your college advisor will begin having individual meetings with you. After two or three meetings we will come up with a list (*see CREATING A COLLEGE LIST section below for further details*) of 20 to 30 institutions that will satisfy some or all of your requirements, and give our estimations of your chances of admission to particular colleges, using the rough categories: "30% or less," "50-50," and "70% or greater." (Essentially, reach, target, and likely categories.) When the list has been compiled, we will discuss our suggestions with the student and send a copy of the list to parents. It is then up to the student and the family to research these schools as fully as possible, attempting to be realistic about individual qualifications and needs.

For those parents able to visit Deerfield for **Spring Family Weekend** (typically early May), there will be a time set aside for us to get together, by appointment. Each year we invite an outside expert to speak to the parents of juniors to offer insights into how a student should approach the task of choosing a college and how the college admission process works. Also, in the spring, we will host a college fair for approximately 100 college representatives. College Advisors are also available at other times by appointment.

LONG WINTER WEEKEND AND SPRING VACATION

This is a good time to make preliminary college visits while college students are on campus. Admissions offices will be in the thick of their meetings and thus tours and information sessions may be limited, but a visit to nearby colleges may help students begin to think about what type of college they might be interested in and why. If possible, visit a larger university and a smaller, perhaps more rural college outside of New England to give you some sense of the variety of colleges there are to choose from.

CREATING A COLLEGE LIST

In the fall of the junior year students are given a questionnaire in which they are asked to answer questions about their high school experience, their life and what they think about when they think about college. Students are also asked to write a reflective personal statement. When these are completed and returned to the College Advising Office you will be asked to schedule a meeting with your college advisor.

The preliminary college list is based on a variety of criteria, both objective and subjective, including information supplied in the questionnaire and observations culled from discussions with you, as well as your school records. Information such as legacy status or athletic recruitability are *not* factors used in determining where a college goes on this initial list. Some introductory information, besides grades and test scores, informing the list will include:

INSTITUTION SIZE

The size of a college or university may impact your opportunities and experiences. The range of majors offered, extracurricular activities, and amount of personal attention will be influenced by the school's size. Do not forget that you can find small departments within a large school, as well as small schools that are part of a consortium.

LOCATION

The distance of a college or university from your home may be important to you. Is it important that you are in close proximity to your home? Or are you looking forward to living in a different part of the

country? Have you always dreamed of living in a warm weather climate or abroad? Do you prefer an urban area or small town? Academic programs are more than just majors. They can also be educational philosophies and teaching methods. Do you like hands-on learning and/or classic great books study? Although many of you may not have a specific field of study you know you want to pursue when the college search process begins, we'll still want to get a sense of particular academic areas of love and loath to develop your initial list.

STUDENT LIFE

While an academic match between you and a college is of the utmost importance, the student life of a campus will also be important. Are you looking for a big sports school, Greek life, active community service, a cappella groups?

DIVERSITY

Racial, religious, and socioeconomic diversity affect the education you will receive. For example, is it important to have a critical mass of international students, or students with a range of political affiliations?

Summer Before Senior Year

Research

Research the colleges on the list from your college advisor and any other institutions that interest you. Use a college guide such as Fiske because it will give you some subjective information not available on websites or in a college's written materials. Take notes as you go—colleges can begin to sound the same but of course they are not. Note curriculum requirements, faculty-student ratios, retention rates, housing, strength of the department(s) that most interest you, location, social life, and any other criteria that are important to you—such as athletics, diversity, community service, etc. Save your notes; they can be helpful when you need to answer supplementary questions to the Common Application about why you are a good match for a particular college.

As part of your research at each college be certain to check out course requirements for particular programs in which you may be interested. For example, if you are planning to apply to any of the University of California campuses you must have a full-year arts course during high school. If you are applying for engineering, please check for specific math/science high school course requirements. Fine arts or architecture programs may require portfolios; what format would they prefer? What's the due date?

Naviance

Whenever possible, we submit transcripts and recommendations electronically using Naviance. This means that it is essential that you keep your Naviance account up to date. Please follow the Naviance instructions, including completing the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act section on the Common Application after August 1. During the summer you will be able to keep a list of colleges you are considering in your Naviance account. After you return to school, you and your advisor will narrow this list down to the schools to which you wish to apply and then activate the list, a critical step in being certain that all of your forms get to the right college at the right time. In addition, we'll be asking your teachers to submit their recommendations electronically to Naviance so that all of your materials reach colleges at the same time.

Visits and Interviews

Determine a visit plan with your parents, and then schedule appointments online to register to visit and interview, if possible. **Select schools from each category on your list that you are most interested in visiting.**

Interview policies vary widely from one school to another. **It is your responsibility to figure out each school's policies and deadlines to schedule an interview.** In general, our advice is to take advantage of the opportunity to interview. Not only is it a chance to learn more about the college, but it will also give you an opportunity to talk about your academic and extracurricular interests. These interviews are not difficult—most Deerfield students are poised, articulate, and comfortable speaking with adults. You will shine! And interviews demonstrate to the college

your sincere interest, which at many colleges today is very important. It is important to express your serious interest at all schools you are considering, even the 50% and 70% schools.

Interviews are either evaluative or informational. In an evaluative interview, the interviewer will assess you as a candidate and write a report for your admission file. An informational interview is non-evaluative and primarily for you to learn more about the college. To prepare for an interview, research the college's offerings in your academic area of interest and have a few prepared questions. Sample questions you could ask are outlined under the [College Visits](#) section of this handbook. Be ready to speak about your academic and extracurricular interests. Practice a mock interview with a college advisor or parent pretending to be the admission officer. After an interview, write a thank you note mentioning specific things you liked about the college.

Teacher Recommendations

While, generally speaking, it is preferable to ask for letters of recommendation in person, your teachers will understand if you email them (be sure your email is full and complete—not simply a request for a letter). We encourage students to ask two junior year teachers by the end of the junior year. The College Advising Office will also provide a form to turn in to your recommending teachers, which will help them write the best possible recommendation. If you have questions about which teacher(s) to ask consult with your college advisor.

ACT/SAT Preparation

Some preparation and review are advisable and discipline is required. Here are a few free or inexpensive ways to study for the SAT or ACT:

- Get a book of practice tests and take one. Score it and go back over the questions you got wrong. Is there a pattern to the kind of problems you missed? Can you learn to do these types of problems?
- Sign up for the SAT question of the day on the College Board website. You will get an SAT question and answer each day in your email.
- Both the College Board website and the ACT website offer tips and practice test questions. Both publish test prep books.

Some Students find it helpful to prepare through private tutoring or group test prep courses. Find more test prep information in the Standardized Testing section of this handbook.

Organization

The college admission process will demand your best organizational skills. To begin with, organize all the information you have received from colleges. As you become interested in a college, learn about its application process. Do they accept the Common Application? If so, do they have a supplement? What testing does the college require? Is the ACT or SAT optional or required? Are SAT Subject Tests required? How many? How many teacher recommendations, if any, do they require? Make a checklist for each college where you plan to apply or devise your own online tracking system. Most colleges will have online portals where you can check the status of your application completeness, as well as, admissions decisions.

Summer Communication

Your college advisor would like to hear from you during the summer. Please contact us at our Deerfield email addresses and provide us with an update of your visits and thinking about college. Of course, as mentioned above, we want to help with essay topics and/or revisions as you begin writing your essays.

Common Application & College Essay

We strongly recommend that students start to fill out the Common Application this summer. On August 1, any updated/new supplemental essays will be published; however, you are free to work on the other parts of the application at any time in the summer.

Summer is the time to begin to tackle this project. Your objective is to tell them something about yourself that they do not know from the rest of your application. That means that you do not want to write a resume or write about an abstract topic that is hard to grasp in 650 words. Instead, try to find a story about you that illustrates something you want colleges to know. Finding a good topic is the hardest part. Start brainstorming. Send your advisor a couple of your best ideas and the two of you can decide which idea has the most potential. Write a first draft, and feel free to send it to your advisor for some feedback. We don't want you to spend hours on it and have us tell you in the fall that we really don't think it will work. By the time you return to Deerfield we hope that you will have a third or fourth draft that we can look over. You may also want to consult with one of your English teachers or your advisor. Try to limit the number of people who look at your essay; too many editors tend to muddy the waters. The College Board has some helpful information on writing an effective college essay.

Senior Year

In the fall, your college advisor will ask for another Information Form and the student will meet with their college advisor in order to share the thinking that has taken place over the summer. At that time, you will narrow the list of colleges to which you will apply. (In past years the average number has been 9-10).

Throughout the fall, representatives of college admissions offices will visit Deerfield. Most of these sessions will be held in groups (both in-person and virtually), a few will be individual interviews—some are used as selective measures, most are simply informational. All college visits are advertised on the college advising bulletin board. Also, if a student has entered a college of interest in Naviance, we will send them an email alerting them if any school on their list visits . . . **another reason it is critical for students to keep the Naviance account up to date!** It is the student's responsibility to arrange with teachers to be excused from class when necessary.

Weekends (especially the Fall Weekend holiday) and Thanksgiving vacation can be used for further college visiting if appointments are scheduled in advance. Thanksgiving break is also a great time to finish up any supplemental essays. Many recruited athletes are also asked to visit for "recruitment weekends" in the fall. **Deerfield's policy for seniors is to allow up to five missed school days for college visits, pursuit of excellence, and other absences combined during the academic year.** Remember also that students will need to use time in the fall for study and to write their applications, so spread out college visits accordingly.

The college advising office asks students to finalize early application thoughts by early October and to have a finalized college list of all schools by early-December. We do this to ensure the timely submission of materials and to help students create high-quality applications for colleges.

Our fall term grades will serve as the "mid-year report" for colleges; thus, we will automatically send these grades off to all colleges where a student has applied.

Early Decision/Action Plans

Early Decision is a plan whereby students who know where they want to go and seem well qualified can apply, usually by November 1 or 15, and they receive a decision in mid-December. There now exist numerous, and sometimes confusing, variations on this theme including Early Action, Single Choice Early Action, Rolling Admissions, and Early Decision II. Our advice: check out any of the early plans with the specific institution involved. A student with a clear first choice and strong qualifications at the time of application may be rewarded with early peace of mind. But, changing student preferences can make a binding commitment to attend a particular institution both premature and uncomfortable. And many students get swept into the early application frenzy without realistically assessing their prospects for early admission. (Almost half of our early candidates are deferred or rejected; only a few of those deferred are later admitted to that college.) Students who wish to file an early application must feel that they are a strong candidate based on their ninth grade, tenth grade, and junior year record and test scores. Applying early to a school can be a way in which you show your interest to a school, and interest can sometimes be a factor in admissions. We also know that there are a growing number of colleges who are filling 50% of their first-year class through early programs. Even so, try not to get caught up in the early frenzy; give your own situation careful thought and have a thorough conversation with your college advisor to see if applying early is right for you. Any student wishing to apply early must let the college office know by early October, so that we have time to complete the paperwork in support of that application.

Gap Year Programs

Each year, a growing number of young people decide to take time away from the traditional academic path that takes students directly from high school to college. By taking this time, students have the opportunity to take a break from the demands of their high school and college experiences, and reflect thoughtfully on their goals and aspirations. From the [Middlebury website on gap years](#): “As earning admission to a top college has more and more become an end in itself, and not just a *means* to an end, we can easily lose sight of the primary goal of our education: to discover what it is we truly care about and want to pursue further, and thereby come as close as possible to realizing our own potential.”

During a gap year (which is typically a year but can be shorter or longer), students reflect, explore and deepen interests, work, volunteer, travel, or take on independent projects.

It is important to understand that taking a gap year generally **does not** change a student’s chances of being admitted to a highly selective college. In fact, most students who take a gap year do so after they’ve been admitted to (and put a deposit down at) a university to hold their space there during their gap year, with a plan to matriculate the following fall. However, taking a gap year does often help students make the most of their experience when they return to school, and is therefore encouraged by many colleges, including [Middlebury](#), [Harvard](#), and [Pomona](#), among others.

College Visits

It is a good idea for you to visit the colleges to which you are thinking of applying. While it is preferable to visit a college when it is in session, summer visits can also be helpful. Walking on the campus, seeing the dorms, sitting in on a class, reading the school newspaper, and chatting with the tour guide will give you a better sense of what that particular school is really like and what matters to the students who go there. A campus visit gives you the opportunity to see what you have previously only read about in guidebooks.

SOME QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOUR TOUR GUIDE OR INTERVIEWER

- Why did you choose this college? Did you apply early—why or why not?
- How do professors teach the classes?
- How available are your professors? Have you ever had lunch with a professor?
- What are some of the best school traditions?
- What are the campus issues that students have talked about most this year?
- What is the music/film/drama/art scene here like?
- How prominent a role does sports/Greek life play in the social life here?
- How large are your classes?
- How competitive is the student body?
- What do you like best about your experience and education here?
- What would you change about the school?
- What are the study abroad opportunities?
- What are weekends like? Do students stay on campus? What are the most popular weekend activities?

Scheduling a College Visit

Information about scheduling a college visit can be found on the college website. A visit to a campus generally consists of a tour and an information session. Sometimes students have the opportunity to sit in on a class or interview; sometimes there are opportunities for overnight stays in the fall. Whether you are planning on taking a tour or are hoping to sit in on a class, **college visits must be planned**. You should never just “drop in” in hopes of scheduling a meeting. Likewise, even if you just want to take a walk around the campus and have lunch in the cafeteria, it is in your best interest to let the admissions office know you are there—sometimes this means filling out an information card at the front desk. Many colleges like to know that students are interested in their school; a visit to the campus demonstrates interest.

At Deerfield, seniors are allowed up to five missed class days for college visits, combined with other absences. We require that students talk to their college advisor about a college visit before filling out the “College Visit” form located on DAinfo.

Standardized Testing

While an increasing number of schools have made standardized tests optional (and a few have even become “test blind”), for most colleges, having a strong SAT or ACT score can help you in the admissions process. Therefore, it is important to understand colleges’ testing requirements, and it is recommended that students plan for and take standardized tests as part of their college application process. All colleges accept the ACT or SAT, and have no preference between the ACT and SAT.

The following are the most common standardized tests. Check <https://deerfield.edu/students/college-advising/standardized-testing> for up-to-date information about test dates, how to register and when these tests are held on and off campus.

- **PSAT/NMSQT** is the Preliminary SAT National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. It is given each October to juniors (tenth-graders may opt in), and Deerfield handles the registration. You do not need to sign up for the PSAT online, but if you are a tenth-grader and would like to opt in, please contact the testing coordinator at testingcoordinator@deerfield.edu. Scores from the third year of high school are used for National Merit Scholarship Qualification (NMSQT), and are for student, college advisor and parent reference only. These scores are not sent to colleges. The PSAT is similar in structure and content to the SAT; strong performance on the PSAT might indicate a preference for the SAT (over the ACT) when the time comes to choose which test to take in the junior winter/spring.
- **SAT** is a content-based test with sections on reading, writing and language, no-calculator math, and calculator math (its writing section has been eliminated). Students are responsible for registering themselves for the SAT by visiting www.collegeboard.org.
- **ACT** is a content-based test with sections on reading, English, math, science, and an optional writing section. The ACT requires students to answer more questions in less time than the SAT, so speed is important. Students are responsible for registering themselves for the ACT by visiting www.actstudent.org.
- **SAT Subject Tests** were discontinued in 2019.

We offer several free ACT and SAT practice tests for students who would like to try it to see if it might be a better test for them. For practice test dates, contact the college advising office.

TESTING ACCOMODATIONS

Students with documented learning differences may need testing accommodations, e.g. extended time. To receive accommodations on tests administered by the College Board or ACT, you must apply for these accommodations. Generally speaking, in order to apply for testing accommodations, the following criteria must be met:

Current documentation of your learning difference must be on file at the school.

Students who “meet the requirements” for accommodations on the SAT, ACT, PSAT, or AP exams must use these same accommodations in school, on a regular basis, in all classes.

It is best if these accommodations have been in place for at least four months of the school year before applying to the College Board or ACT for accommodations.

Students in need of testing accommodations should begin by contacting Mrs. Koyama, Director of Academic Support to initiate the process for on campus accommodations. Once four months have passed, Mrs. Koyama will contact the student and parents directly to initiate the process with the College Board and ACT. Any questions regarding testing accommodations should be directed to Mrs. Koyama at skoyama@deerfield.edu.

More information about SAT testing accommodations and disability documentation guidelines can be found at <http://collegeboard.com/ssd> or, for the ACT, at www.act.org/aap/disab.

Testing Timeline

The College Advising office is happy to help you plan a testing timeline. For most juniors that will be an early conversation once a College Advisor is assigned, but if you have questions before then, please email advising@deerfield.edu or come by our office and make an appointment. The information below can help you think about the timeline that will work best for you.

EACH YEAR

- Look for instructions from the Testing Coordinator in the fall to sign up for and take any AP tests for which you are qualified.

GRADES NINE AND TEN

- Tenth-graders consider taking the PSAT in October. Deerfield will register all juniors automatically, but tenth-graders may opt in by emailing testingcoordinator@deerfield.edu

JUNIOR YEAR

- Most students will take the SAT or ACT 2-3 times total, and many students achieve their highest score in the fall of their senior year. Preparing for and taking the test more than three times takes up a lot of energy, so for the majority of students, we recommend preparing for your first test the winter of your junior year and taking it in the spring (April ACT or May SAT) of your junior year. Students may then take a second/third test in the summer (July ACT or August SAT) and/or in senior fall (September ACT or October SAT) as determined by the student in consultation with the college advisor.

Who should consider beginning testing early (Junior Fall):

- **Recruited Athletes.** Coaches often need test scores in order to know whether they will be able to recruit you to their teams, and DI coaches need official test scores in order to invite you to an official visit. We therefore recommend recruited athletes (all NCAA divisions) begin testing in the fall of Junior Year after some summer preparation.
- **Particularly Strong Testers.** If you've performed very well in the past on standardized tests, take a practice test this summer. If you score above a 33 on the ACT or a 1460 on the SAT, consider doing some test prep over the summer and signing up for a test in the fall.

Students should reach out to the College Advising Office at advising@deerfield.edu if they're considering testing this fall or if they have any questions.

Other dates to note:

- October: All Juniors take PSAT (Deerfield will sign students up)
- Fall/Winter: Proctored practice tests are available on campus—look for emails from the College Advising Office with details.

- The ACT is offered in September, December, and April at Deerfield, and in February, October, June, and July at other test sites.
- The SAT is offered in October, November, December, and May at Deerfield, and in March, June, and August at other test sites.

SENIOR YEAR

Retake the SAT and/or ACT as needed. Early Decision/Early Action applicants can generally still take the September ACT or October and November SAT exams and have their scores available for colleges in the early round. The December tests are usually the last ones that can be used for ED 2 and Regular rounds.

Test Optional/Flexible

Many colleges are now testing optional and some, like the University of California system, are now “test blind” meaning they will not consider test scores even if they are submitted. Test Optional schools may not require any tests at all, or they may require an alternate submission (graded writing sample) to substitute for standardized tests. For an up-to-date list of test optional institutions, check out the Fair Test website at www.fairtest.org.

While electing to omit test scores is the right choice in some circumstances, for most colleges, having a strong SAT or ACT score can still help you in the admissions process. Therefore, it is important to understand colleges’ testing requirements, and it is recommended that students plan for and take standardized tests as part of their college application process.

Test Preparation

Familiarity with the organization and types of questions on any standardized test will be helpful, as it will allow a student to focus on the content of the questions without having to spend extra time during the exam to figure out the directions. Some basic and common-sense strategies are useful in preventing extra stress and wasted time during those important hours.

There are many types of test preparation available for the SAT, the SAT subject tests, and the ACT. These include books that students use to prepare on their own, self-paced online courses (including free self-paced online instruction through Khan Academy), in-person and online courses, as well as one-on-one tutoring. Some students are motivated to prepare on their own, while others may find that they are more comfortable and confident with a formal course. At the very least, students should familiarize themselves with the format of the exams by using the booklets with sample questions provided by the testing service. Preferably students should take a full-length practice test and score it. Look over the questions answered incorrectly or not answered. Are there specific areas in which a student can improve? How well was the test time managed? There are sample questions and test taking tips on the College Board and the ACT web sites. All contain practice questions, as do many of the test preparation books one can find in bookstores or online sites like Amazon.

LIVE INSTRUCTION TEST PREP SERVICES

Deerfield works with Revolution Prep to provide test prep options to Deerfield students looking for live instruction. Revolution Prep offers one-on-one tutoring and small-group courses, all of which are offered live online using a video platform. Financial aid is available for the small group courses; please contact your College Advisor if you have questions about financial aid. The College Advising office communicates with students and families to keep them apprised of these options.

NCAA Guidelines

NCAA has specific requirements for eligibility. If you have aspirations to play NCAA athletics at a Division I or Division II college, you must meet their core course requirements by certain deadlines, which can be more complicated if you have repeated a grade or gone to an international high school. Students who wish to play a sport in college at the Division I, IA, or II level, must register with the NCAA Clearinghouse by the end of their junior year. You can request your NCAA transcript online. Students for whom Division I or II athletics are a possibility should consult the NCAA's "Quick reference sheet" at http://fs.ncaa.org/Docs/eligibility_center/Quick_Reference_Sheet.pdf and with their college advisor when choosing classes.

Repeating a Grade

The NCAA has certain deadlines by which you must complete classes during high school. **THIS IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT:** Repeating a grade does not extend NCAA deadlines for completion of these requirements. Therefore, you must plan your courses carefully if you've repeated a grade. Further, when repeating a grade upon entering Deerfield, you may lose NCAA credit for one or more classes taken at your previous school. If NCAA deems that two courses duplicate each other, they will deny credit for one. Under those circumstances, we will work with you to make the necessary adjustments to your schedule.

In certain circumstances, NCAA will consider early determination of eligibility in your junior (or third) year (see "Juniors" below). Overt interest from a college can be a powerful catalyst. If a college is interested in you, please let the NCAA know as soon as possible. The college can then act on your behalf in facilitating an early determination of eligibility. Final approval is based on a completed transcript.

What You Need to Do

GRADES NINE AND TEN

- Start planning now!
- Work hard to get the best grades possible.
- Choose NCAA-approved classes.

JUNIORS (OR STUDENTS IN THEIR THIRD YEAR OF ELIGIBILITY)

1. At the beginning of your third year, log on to the NCAA Eligibility Center website at eligibilitycenter.org and register.
2. Register to take the ACT, SAT or both and use the NCAA Eligibility Center code "9999" as a score recipient. (Test score requirements are listed on the website.)
3. Double-check to make sure that you are taking NCAA-approved courses.
4. Request that your high school official transcript be sent to NCAA Eligibility Center after completing your third year of high school.
5. Prior to registration for your fourth year of high school, check with the Academic Affairs office and the NCAA Eligibility Center to determine the number of core courses that need to be completed that year (i.e., before your window of eligibility closes).

More detailed information can be found on the NCAA website. Failure to meet requirements could result in you not being able to play Division I or Division II sports in college. Ultimately, it is your responsibility to ensure you have met the NCAA eligibility requirements.

Naviance Family Connection

Students register for Naviance in the fall of their junior year, and parents typically sign up in January. Naviance will be a critical and helpful tool in your college search; this page describes steps of the college process that you will need to complete through Naviance.

REGISTER FOR NAVIANCE FAMILY CONNECTION

1. Email advising@deerfield.edu, if you need a registration code.
2. Go to Naviance, and bookmark this page! Note: You must use your Deerfield email address as your username.
3. Update the list of colleges you're considering. Under "colleges I'm thinking about," you should enter the list of colleges and universities that you're currently considering. To add colleges:
 - a. Click on "colleges I'm thinking about"
 - b. Click on "search for colleges" and type in the name of the college you want to add.
 - c. Click on the heart icon to highlight it and add that college to your list.
 - d. To add your level of interest to each college - from your "colleges I'm thinking about" list click on N/A under the "interest" tab. Then, click on your level of interest (low, medium, high, first choice) from the drop down menu. Next, check the blank box before the college name and click on "update interest" tab at the top of your college list.
 - e. To delete colleges, check the box in front of the college's name, and click "remove."
4. About Me—this section allows you to store information about your college process and track the list of colleges you're considering and eventually applying to.

A few notes about the "my profile" section: The GPA listed for returning students is through junior year; new students will not have a GPA. Test scores will be updated for all students as new test scores are received from College Board and ACT.

- **Research Colleges:** You can use Family Connection to help you research college opportunities.
- **College Search** allows you to search for colleges based on specific criteria.
- **College Lookup** lets you look up specific colleges, where you can review college information, see statistics about Deerfield applications to that college, and link to the college's website.
- **College Compare** shows Deerfield application statistics for a selection of colleges.
- **Scattergrams** charts five years of Deerfield admission activity at specific colleges.
- **Discuss your plans.** As you do your research and make your college plans, be sure to touch base regularly with your college advisor. Any questions? Ask your college advisor!
- Complete the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) section on the Common Application website (after August 1). Once completed, enter your Common Application username and password on your Naviance account. This information is used only for the purpose of electronic submission of your recommendation forms and transcripts to colleges. In order for us to submit teacher recommendations, it is in your best interest to waive your rights. You must have confidence the teachers you ask to write on your behalf will be fair and accurate in recommending you in a positive light to college. Colleges tend to take the recommendation more seriously when rights have been waived, and they know the recommendation is secure and confidential.

Financial Aid and Scholarships

What You and Your Parents Need to Know

Much has been written in recent years about the spiraling costs of higher education, the total price tag ranging from \$60,000 to \$80,000 at many state colleges and universities, to \$250,000 or more at many private institutions of higher learning. The good news is that almost all colleges and universities offer financial aid to admitted students and families that demonstrate financial need so that these educational opportunities remain within reach. You and your parents need to sit down and discuss how you as a family are going to pay for college, and it's important for you to research financial aid programs as you do your college search, if financial aid will be part of your planning. It's better to ask questions during the planning stage rather than be taken by surprise at the end of the process. There has also been a national debate emerging about the relative value of a college education and whether the burden of college loans, part of all financial aid packages offered by colleges, is worth it. Again, those are questions that you and your parents will need to talk about as you move through this process.

Important Terms to Know

- **Financial Aid** refers to need-based monetary awards given to you by a particular college after an evaluation of your family's financial situation and a determination that your family will be unable to pay for the costs of that particular college. This need-based aid has nothing to do with your academic record and depends almost completely on you and your family's aid application and current federal tax forms. At most colleges and universities today 60% or more of the student body receives some form of financial aid so colleges are working hard to make their educational opportunities open to all potential students. It's also important to keep in mind as you do your planning that, even though most colleges state that they are "need blind" as they evaluate and admit or deny candidates for admission, the fact of the matter is that only a small handful of well-endowed colleges are truly "need blind" in their admissions. Most colleges and universities today are "need aware" as they evaluate and admit their class each year because they are working with finite financial aid budgets. *That is why it is especially important for students who know they will be applying for financial aid to look at a broad range of admission selectivity in their college search.*
- **Financial Aid Packages** refer to the way that aid will be awarded to you and your family. There will be a "family contribution" that will include a Parent Contribution and a Student Contribution, often from summer earnings. There will be an institutional grant, scholarship money that you do not have to pay back. And then there will be Student Loans that you will be expected to take out and then pay back after you finish college. Frequently, you will be expected to work a few hours each week in a college work/study job that you've chosen from the offerings posted in the Financial Aid Office. Financial Aid Packages can vary significantly from college to college. You want to do a lot of preliminary research so that you know what you're getting into before you apply and before you receive a decision.
- **Merit-based Scholarships** are institutional monies awarded by individual colleges and universities, often for outstanding talent in some particular area. These scholarships could reward outstanding academic records, extracurricular attainments in the arts, community service, or strength of character. Demonstrated financial need does not usually factor into these merit awards and all applicants at a college that offers them are considered during the application evaluation period. Sometimes referred to as tuition discounts, these merit awards are often a way for less selective colleges to attract really talented students to their respective institutions. There may also be named merit scholarships at a particular institution that require a separate application. College admissions websites often list these scholarships, and you can always ask college admissions representatives about the opportunity for merit awards at their respective colleges. A good rule of thumb to keep in mind: the more selective the institution, the less likely merit awards will be given.
- **Local/Area Scholarships** may also be available from your home state or your local community. Local civic organizations may have smaller yearly awards to help local families handle the cost of college. While

these scholarships sometimes go exclusively to local public school students, it certainly doesn't hurt to inquire about the application process, either through the various civic groups or at the local public high school. Be aware that colleges will sometimes use part of this scholarship money to reduce the grant or apply it to your loan, so you won't see the entire value applied to your family contribution.

- **FAFSA stands for "Free Application for Federal Student Aid"** and is required by every college and university if you are an aid applicant. It is the universal application from the US Department of Education, and both student and parents need to fill out the form online after establishing an account at fafsa.ed.gov. You will each need a PIN, and you will need to file your FAFSA by the school's deadline in order to be eligible for Federal financial aid. Deadlines are crucial in this process—don't jeopardize a potential financial aid award because your forms have not been prepared in a timely fashion! Don't get sucked into fafsa.com or fafsa.net sites, either, that will try to charge you for filling out the forms—it's a FREE application!
- **The CSS Profile** is offered by the College Board and may be required by some colleges and universities who need or want more extensive financial information from your family than the FAFSA provides. You must register online, and you will need a credit card because you do have to pay to have your profile sent to each of the colleges that require it. Check the financial aid websites at the specific colleges where you will be applying to find out if the CSS Profile is required. Make sure you and your parents meet all deadlines.
- **Divorced or Separated Parents** will have to complete Non-custodial Parent forms for both the FAFSA and the CSS Profile. Most colleges expect both biological parents to contribute to the costs of a child's college education, so there are confidential forms that are required. Failure to complete the forms could jeopardize a financial aid award, so make sure you keep both of your parents informed and aware of deadlines if they are divorced or separated. Consult the individual financial aid offices if issues about this arise.
- **International Students** applying for financial aid need to be aware that the competition for financial aid is incredibly competitive and that many American colleges and universities do not have any financial aid in their budgets to bring in needy international students, or that there are caps on just how much aid they can offer to deserving international students. You need to ask these questions of college admissions officers as you do your preliminary college search: Is there aid for international students? Is there a cap or a limit on how much aid there is for an admitted international student? How many international students are admitted each year to your institution, and how many are receiving financial aid? Answers to these questions are vital to know as you go through this process.

If you are an international student applying for financial aid you will need to file the International Student CSS Profile and have it sent to the colleges to which you are applying, and then supply each college with your parents' most recent income tax return from your home country, translated into English and converted to US dollars, or a certified statement of earnings from your parents' employers if there is no tax return. Some college financial aid offices may require additional information, so be sure to consult each individual financial aid office to see about eligibility and any other special requirements.

Colleges also often require Affidavits of Support and Certification of Finances for international students (particularly ones who are not seeking need based financial aid). Most banks have ample experience with providing such documentation and will guide you accordingly. The Certification of Finances will provide documentation that you and your family have the financial means to provide funding for four years of tuition, room and board, as well as other expenses. Please note that colleges require original documents. Students can find the International Student Certification of Finances Guidelines on most college websites.

- **A Financial Aid Calculator/Net Price Calculator** is now required by the US Attorney General's Office on every college financial aid website so that you can plug in the numbers for both student and parent, taken from recent income tax forms, bank statements, etc., and get a rough estimate of what you and your family may be expected to pay. Your parents will probably want to handle this part of the process but it's

a good way for them to see the huge variations in financial aid awards that you will see from college to college. Be aware that Deerfield Academy is often more generous with financial aid than the vast majority of colleges will be. Every college website has a Net Price Calculator, so take advantage of the opportunity to take an early peek at what your future education will cost.

